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U.S. Says All Major Soviet Spies Will Be Gone

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 22 — Reagan Administration officials said today that the 55 Soviet diplomats ordered to leave by Nov. 1 included all the senior spies in the United States.

The officials said the two Soviet espionage agencies — the K.G.B., the main intelligence agency, and the G.R.U., military intelligence — had suffered a severe blow. The officials said it takes years to train English-speaking agents and the Soviet Union would have to use less experienced operatives.

One official used the word "decapitation" for what was done to the espionage network. Another said, "It is probably the end of an era as far as Soviet operations in the United States are concerned."

The 55, in addition to the previously expelled 25 Soviet diplomats at the United Nations, the American official said, include the station chiefs of both the K.G.B. and the G.R.U. in San Francisco, New York and Washington. In addition, the heads of each division, or line, within the K.G.B. are leaving.

The officials said the 55 included code clerks, operatives for intercepting communications, street agents, report writers, and supervisors.

According to the Americans, there are 300 agents among the 900 Soviet citizens stationed in diplomatic missions in the United States.

"The effect of this is a body blow to their leadership, but they still have hundreds of intelligence officers," an official said. "They are not out of business."

The expulsion was announced Tuesday as a means of equalizing the numbers of embassy staffs in the two countries. Last year, Congress passed legislation requiring equality in numbers.

The legislation was opposed by Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who, in a letter to House members before

passage of the bill, said:

"To establish strict numerical parity could greatly reduce our flexibility to make necessary changes."

Referring to the practice of expelling diplomats by declaring them persona non grata, the letter said, "Any precipitous PNGing of large numbers of Soviets would lead to their retaliation against our intelligence, political, economic and consular operations in Moscow."

Administration officials noted that the K.G.B. traditionally sent its most experienced agents to the United States. They said, for example, that John A. Walker Jr., the former Navy man convicted of spying, had been handled by a K.G.B. agent who had served in the United States before.

American officials said the loss of diplomatic openings might set off a

competition between the Foreign Ministry and the K.G.B. since any additional intelligence agent would have to be added at the expense of a career diplomat.

The officials said the Soviet Union could rely more on Soviet nationals who would slip across the border illegally. The officials said, however, that the use of diplomats with ready access to communication facilities was still preferred by the Russians.

The officials cited the 1972 expulsion by Britain of 105 Soviet diplomats as an example of the impact of expulsions.

"They lost certain capabilities that they were never able to quite recover from," an official said.